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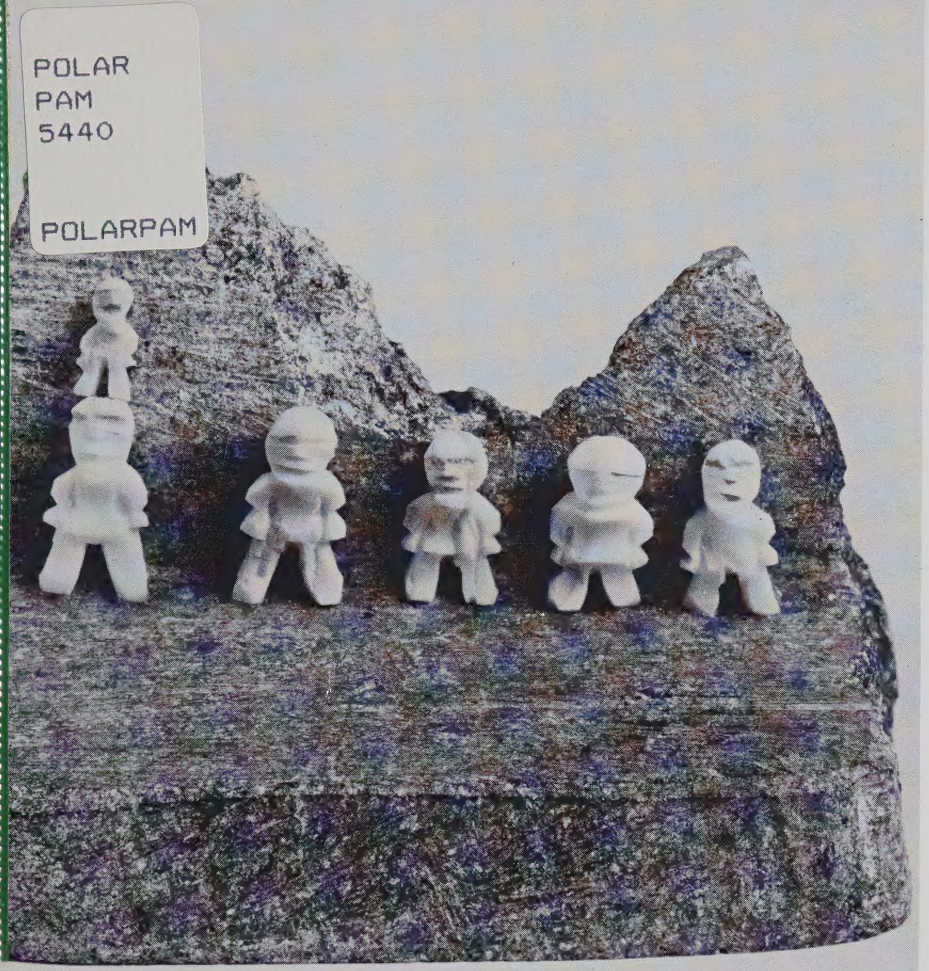

MARC TUNGILIK

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RECENT SCULPTURE

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COVER: **ROW OF FIGURES, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
3.7 × 5.5 × 3 cm

Rec'd: July 29/82
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MARC TUNGILIK

RECENT SCULPTURE

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MARC TUNGILIK

For twenty years the sculpture of Marc Tungilik has been eagerly sought by southern collectors of Inuit art and recent carvings by this artist, now in his late 60's, continue to fascinate the careful observer. Although his work fits easily into the tradition of small, composite carvings that has characterized the art of Repulse Bay and Pelly Bay (where Tungilik was born), his carvings are unique. They are shaped by a personal aesthetic that combines a form of expressionism with an interest in realism. It results in distinctive animal and human figure types, a desire to provide a setting for his carved figures and a use of Christian and shamanic subjects that is uncharacteristic of Repulse Bay sculpture.

In a recent taped interview, Tungilik spoke of what he tried to achieve in his art and reminisced about his long career as a sculptor.[1] He began carving when he was a teenager and his first works were human figures in stone, usually holding ivory harpoons. Dogteams became a specialty and Tungilik remembers carving these completely from ivory, including the harnesses. This was a difficult task, however, and visual records of his work show that he was using sinew and other natural substances in his complex scenes of the 1950's. Tungilik credits a Roman Catholic priest, Father Rivoire, with encouraging him to do miniatures. Father Franz van der Velde has also written of his own successful efforts in Pelly Bay in 1945 to get the artist to make a small bust of Christ.[2] Thus present-day subjects such as angels (no. 16) and priests (no. 10) are a continuation of these early religious influences.

James Houston was in Repulse Bay in 1950 in an effort to determine the artistic potential of the area and he has recorded that Tungilik was living there at that time.[3] Ivory from walrus tusks was abundant and with Houston's encouragement, it became the usual carving material. In discussing his use of materials, Tungilik has explained that stone is not suitable for making miniatures because it breaks easily. However, he does enjoy doing large carvings when he is able to get substantial pieces of stone — rather rare in Repulse Bay. His larger stone sculptures are usually muskoxen with horns made from real horn. Medium size and small stone pieces depict walruses, foxes and muskoxen. The artist has noted that the larger stone carvings are easier to make than tiny ivory miniatures. To form his ivory carvings the raw ivory is placed in a vise-grip and is worked with files of different sizes. The finer detailing is done by holding the small pieces in his fingers — a process the artists now finds difficult because of brittle fingernails and tools that are not small enough.

When asked about his favourite subjects, Tungilik lists muskoxen, human figures, foxes and rabbits, but this reply gives no indication of the variety to be found in his work. Human figures stare spectrally at the viewer singly (no. 4) and in groups (no. 1) or are involved in a specific action, such as drumming (no. 5). In a format that is unique to Tungilik, a row of figures share a shelf-like base in a mute expression of companionship (cover and no. 8). People and various kinds of animals co-exist peacefully or violently as hunter and hunted (no. 12 and no. 14). Animal and human forms merge in works that show a shaman and his helping spirits (no. 2). In Inuit art it is common to see spirit helpers perched on the shoulder or protruding from the head of a shaman (no. 3). Spirits sometimes take the form of diminutive human beings and are shown near the shaman or in his mouth where they sometimes lived (no. 3 and no. 7). It seems likely that another carving, *Man Riding a Fish* (no. 11), is based on an episode in the well-known legend of Kiviuq in which the Ulysses-like Inuit hero rides a magic fish to cross a river.

While speaking of his sculpture in the interview, Tungilik stressed his belief that things should be depicted as they actually appear in real life. He disapproved of a caribou-shaped handle of a jewellery box given to him to examine because it was not "natural" to see a caribou on top of a box. This explains the artist's desire to put his subjects on bases that emulate real topography. These bases create a self-contained environment for the figures, quite separate from ours. But Tungilik's reality is visual — a perceived reality. When it was pointed out to him that the large rabbit and a small man of one of his carvings was not realistic he explained that it had to be that way because the rabbit was close and the Inuk was at a distance. The smallest of his sculptures — tiny figures on very small bases — give the viewer the impression of seeing them across a long, treeless expanse of Arctic tundra. This is the reality of the artist in which things appear as they are seen, not as they are.

Another aspect of Tungilik's personal aesthetic is his use of expression. He has explained that since a carving will not move, he gives his figures expressions to show that they are "in action" or that they are "doing something". It is this effort to bring his figures and animals to life that contributes to the distinctive quality of his carvings. Faces in particular mirror physical or mental activity, and the exaggerated grimaces are sometimes quite humourous. Mouths and pupils of the

eyes are often drilled giving facial features an added intensity. The imaginative observer can almost hear the shouts and laughter spilling forth from the open mouths. Even figures not in motion are expressive, with arms clenched at the sides, shoulders hunched over and feet spread apart, firmly planted on the ground.

Tungilik's art reveals a strong social interest, depicting people acting and interacting in a specific environment. This can be a shared setting or a stage-like space in which one or more figures confront the viewer with their steady, outward gazes. It is difficult to resist being drawn into this miniature world created by the artist.

Darlene Wight
Fine Arts Department
Canadian Arctic Producers

[1]Taped interview with Marc Tungilik, February 1982, Repulse Bay.
[2]Father Franz van der Velde, O.M.I. *Canadian Eskimo Artists: A Biographical Dictionary. Pelly Bay*. Government of the Northwest Territories, Yellowknife, 1970, p. 23.
[3]James Houston, "Repulse Bay 1950" in *Repulse Bay*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1978/79, p. 20.

MARC TUNGILIK (TONGIKIK, TONGELIK)

Born: 1915 on Boothia Peninsula
Resides in Repulse Bay; previously resided in Pelly Bay.
Sculpture

EXHIBITIONS:

1967	Eskimo Sculpture Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg
1970	Sculpture Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, Ottawa (illustrated catalogue)
1971-1972	Sculpture/Inuit: Masterworks of the Canadian Arctic Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, Ottawa (international tour) (illustrated catalogue)
Feb.-April 1973	The Bessie Bullman Collection Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg (illustrated catalogue)
1975	Sculpture Exhibition: In honour of Canadian Arctic Producers' Tenth Anniversary Canadian Arctic Producers, Ottawa
Mar.-July 1976	The Mulders Collection of Eskimo Sculpture Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg (illustrated catalogue)
Dec. 1978-Mar. 1979	Repulse Bay Sculpture Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg (illustrated catalogue)
1979	In Celebration Canadian Guild of Crafts, Montreal
Sept.-Oct. 1979	Inuit Sculpture University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor (illustrated catalogue)
1981	Ivory Sculpture Snow Goose, Ottawa

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

1973	Mark Tungilik Canadian Guild of Crafts, Montreal
May 1973	Sculpture by Mark Tungilik of Repulse Bay Snow Goose, Ottawa

COLLECTIONS:

Canadian Guild of Crafts, Montreal (illustrated catalogue)
Jerry Twomey Collection, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg.
Mulders Collection, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg.
Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg.

HONOURS:

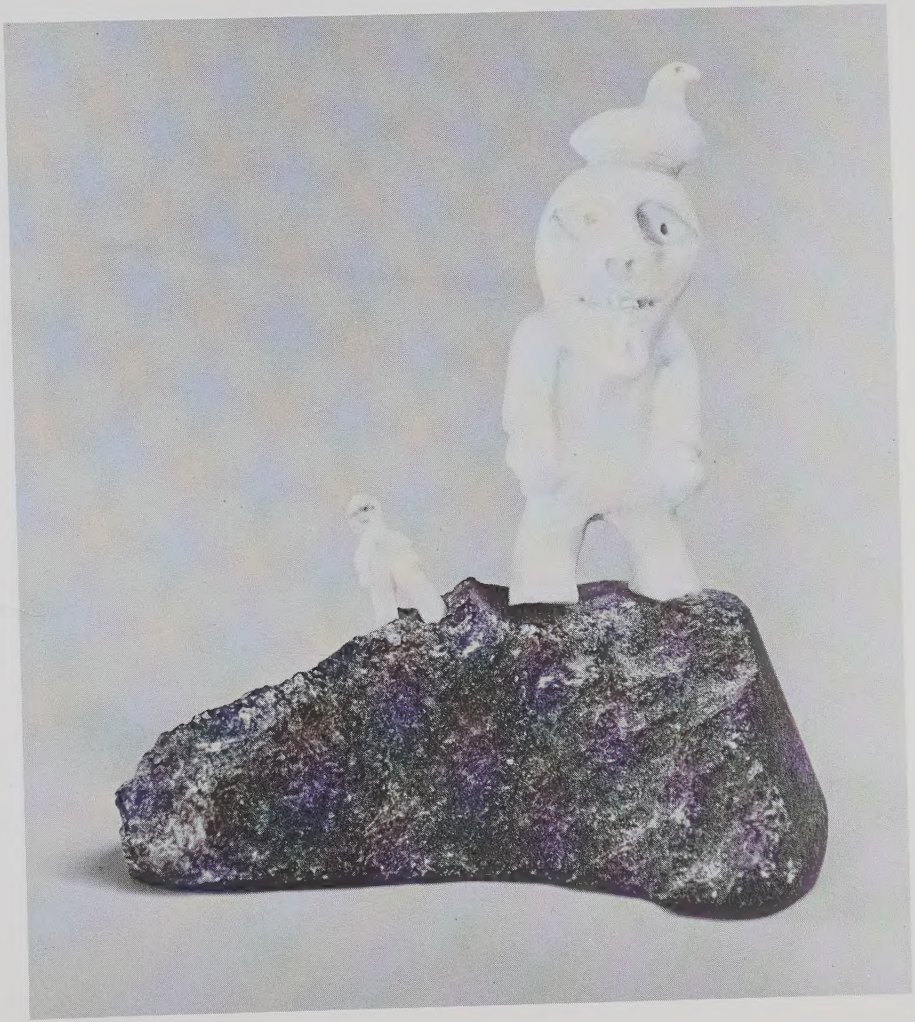
Pope Pius XII was presented with one of his miniature carvings in 1948.

SELECTED REFERENCES:

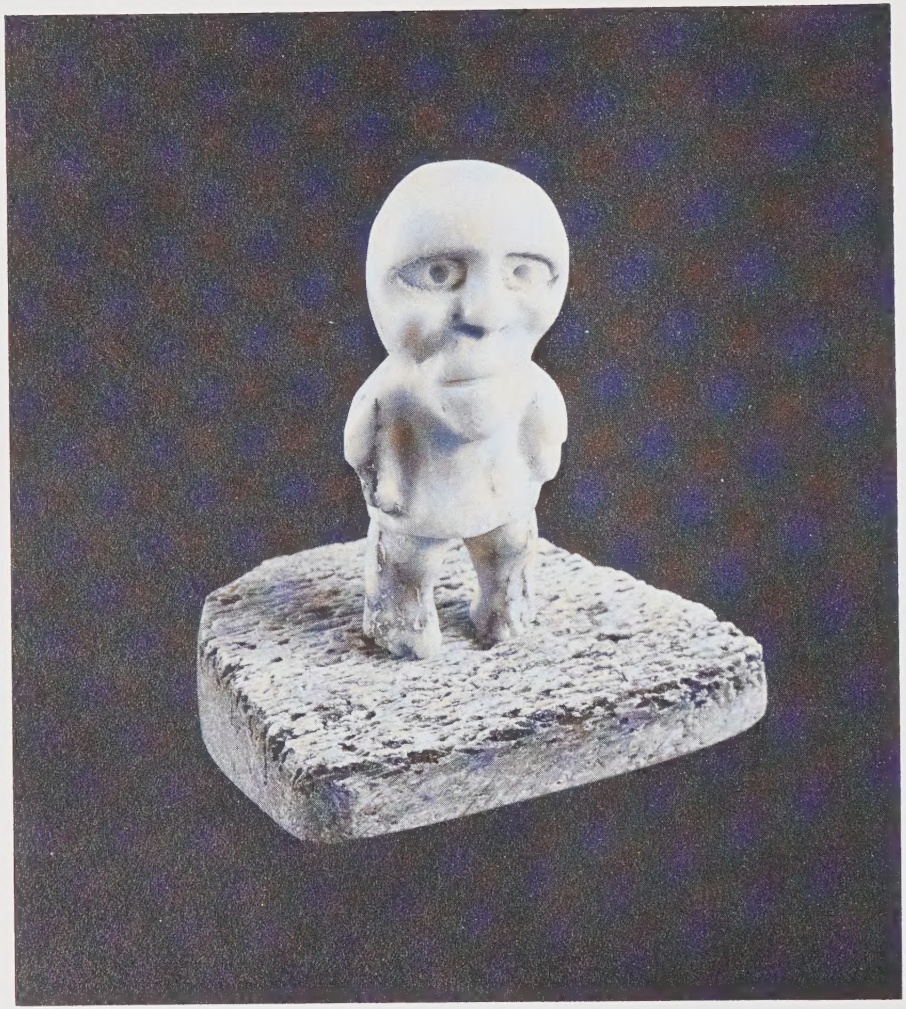
Sculpture of the Eskimo
George Swinton, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1972

TWO MEN, 1981
ivory and grey stone
4.5 × 5.5 × 3 cm

2. **SHAMAN, SPIRIT AND BIRD, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
6.7 × 5.5 × 2.2 cm

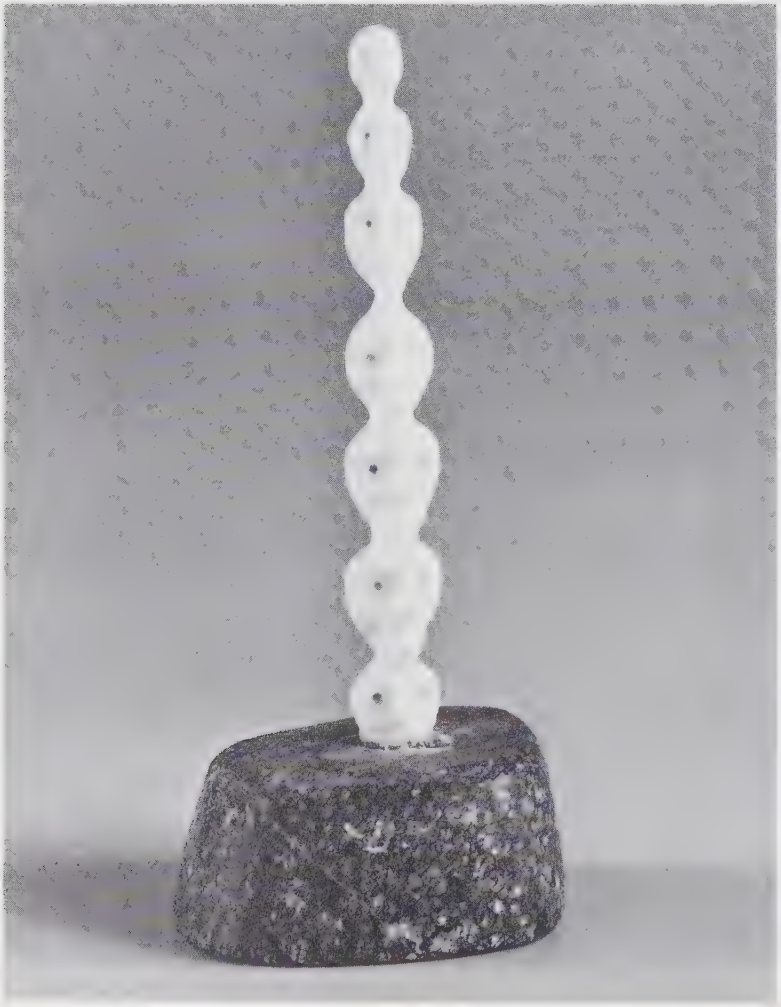


8. **SHAMAN AND SPIRITS, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
6.7 × 6 × 3.2 cm



4. **STANDING MAN, 1981**
ivory and bone
7 × 6.2 × 4.7 cm

5. **DRUMMER, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
4.6 × 2.1 × 2.8 cm



6. **TOTEM, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
8.5 × 4 × 3 cm

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7. **SHAMAN AND SPIRIT, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
4 × 2 × 3.8 cm

8. **ROW OF MEN, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
1.7 × 8 × 1.5 cm

9. **FOX AND BIRD, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
3.2 × 3.5 × 3.7 cm

10 **PRIEST, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
4.7 × 3.6 × 1.5 cm

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11. **MAN RIDING A FISH, 1981**
ivory, caribou hoof and grey stone
4 × 3.2 × 6.3 cm

12. **MAN AND SEAL, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
3.3 × 3.5 × 3.1 cm

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13. **THREE FIGURES, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
3.5 × 7 × 4 cm

14. **MAN AND POLAR BEAR, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
4.8 × 8 × 5 cm

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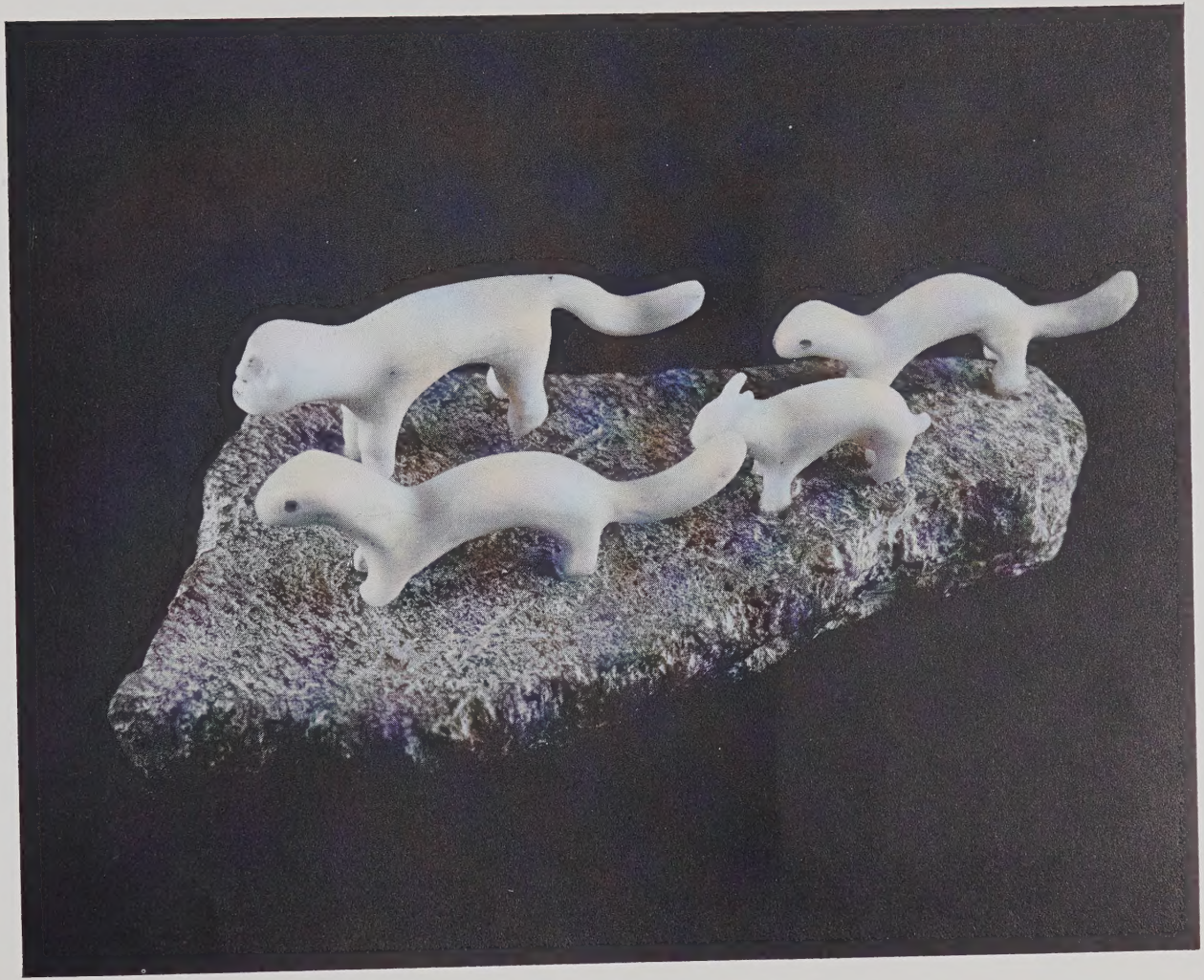
15. **SPIRIT, FOXES AND RABBIT, 1981**
ivory and grey stone
3.5 · 11 · 6 cm



16. **ANGEL, 1981**
ivory and grey stone, 1981
3.7 × 1.6 × 1.1 cm

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